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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 001034

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [VE](#)  
SUBJECT: VENEZUELA'S LEADING UNIVERSITY FACES GBRV PRESSURE

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Classified By: A/POLITICAL COUNSELOR DARNALL STEUART,  
REASONS 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Rector of Universidad Central de Venezuela (UCV) Dr. Cecilia Garcia Arocha and senior university administrators met the PAO on August 5 and discussed the proposed Education Law in the National Assembly and the serious political pressure faced by the country's most renowned, and staunchly independent, university. Dr. Garcia said that UCV was leading a group of educators and students to try to stop the passage of the Education Law, which Minister of Education Hector Navarro has said should be approved before the start of the new school year in September. She noted that the university was developing distance-learning education opportunities to respond to the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela's (GBRV's) demands that UCV should be accessible to more students. UCV is a public university and does not charge tuition; its budget has been drastically decreased this year. Dean of Students Sara Levy and Administration Vice Rector Bernardo Mendez also said that 30% of new students are "assigned" by the GBRV, and are not subject to the university admissions process. The UCV leadership appreciated the Embassy's educational exchange programs and is interested in strengthening and developing more cooperation. End Summary.

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EDUCATION LAW APPEARS IMMINENT  
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¶2. (C) Dr. Garcia said that all indications point to the imminent approval of the draft Education Law. Nonetheless, she is working with leaders of other universities and student groups to prevent the law from being passed. Minister of Education Hector Navarro, however, said on August 3 that he expects the new law to take effect before the start of the next school year in September. Dr. Nicolas Bianco, the Academic Vice Rector, told the PAO that he thinks the new law is designed to centralize control and "to militarize the education system." Unlike many academic contacts, Dr. Garcia said that notwithstanding her objections to the draft law, implementation of the law would not be as difficult as people think. "The government is already training teachers on how to implement the law," she insisted.

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MORE STUDENTS, LESS RESOURCES  
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¶3. (C) As a public university, UCV receives its budget from the GBRV. It is under significant pressure to increase its student body to accommodate increasing demand for education.

Bianco described the university's project to introduce distance learning throughout Venezuela, which the Rector said was the only answer to the GBRV's pressure to accept more students. This year, UCV's budget has been cut by 6% by the GBRV, which is basing its budgetary allocations on the number of students, rather than the type, level, or quality of education. Thus, Mendez said, the GBRV is shifting resources to new pro-government universities, some of which do not have physical campuses. "These universities receive funding," Levy said, "but the students aren't learning anything and are very frustrated." While demands on UCV to accept more students have increased, its real budget, given both the budget cut and the annual inflation rate of 30%, has decreased significantly.

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30% OF THE STUDENTS ARE CHOSEN BY THE GBRV  
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¶4. (C) Levy said that 30% of new students are not selected by the general admission process but instead are now assigned seats in UCV by the GBRV. These students tend to be pro-government, and many are already trained political activists. Levy said "many are not interested in studying." Many are also not ready for the academic rigor of UCV, and fail after a few semesters. "It is a disservice to these students," the Rector said. Levy noted that while students at UCV have long been active politically, the difference is that these students come to the university having already been trained as political activists by pro-Chavez groups and without the necessary academic preparation.

¶5. (C) The change in the admissions system was only forced on the university last year. The student body still elects representatives who are decidedly critical of the government.

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¶6. (C) Comment: UCV is the largest, oldest, and most respected university in Venezuela. While it greatly values its independence and autonomy, it is also a public university and depends on the GBRV for its budget. The university student movement, led in great part by UCV students, has been a credible and popular voice opposing Chavez; student protests played an important role in the successful campaign to reject the constitutional referendum in December 2007. The pressure on UCV to accept more students, to take students chosen by the GBRV, and to reduce its activities due to budget constraints may be part of the GBRV's attempts to weaken independent universities and minimize the possibility of effective student opposition to the government.

DUDDY